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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:

Priority Theme: “Fostering social development and social justice through social policies to accelerate progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to achieve the overarching goal of poverty eradication”

Statement submitted by International Association of Schools of Social Work, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) endorses the important theme chosen for the 62nd session of the United Nations Commission for Social Development and the choice of SDGs 1, 10 and 17 for emphasis. IASSW is the worldwide organization of schools of social work and social work educators, with member institutions across six continents. It has represented the interests of social work education and the values of the profession globally for over 90 years since its initiation at the first International Conference of Social Work, held in Paris, France in 1928. The IASSW is one of the earliest nongovernmental organizations to be granted consultative status with the United Nations (UN). It has been continuously involved with the United Nations since granted consultative status in 1947.

The IASSW is guided by the following principles: the recognition of the inherent dignity of people, promoting human rights, promoting social justice by challenging discrimination, respecting diversity, ensuring access to equitable resources, challenging unjust policies and practices that keep people oppressed, building solidarity among individuals and communities, and ensuring individuals' and communities' integrity. These principles are reflected in the official documents of the organization, including the International Definition of Social Work, the Statement of Ethical Principles, and the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training.

We are committed to the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As the 62nd Commission for Social Development nears, the emphases on social justice, equality and poverty eradication are more important than ever. The situation at the halfway point to 2030 is dire. As reported in the SDG 2023 report, the SDGs are moderately or severely off track. Not only are almost half the goals moderately or severely off track, 37% are showing stagnation or even regression. Secretary General António Guterres at the SDG Action Weekend in September 2023 stated that only 12% of the SDGs are on track to being met. At the current pace, well over 500 million people will still live in extreme poverty in 2030 and it will take 300 years to achieve gender equality.

We are currently living in challenging and perhaps unprecedented times, deeply tainted with conflict and disaster, both human-caused and naturally driven. COVID-19, wars in Ukraine and now Israel and Palestine, and the climate crisis have caused or are causing regression in poverty and inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the largest rise in inequality in three decades. Today, one in six people face some form of discrimination, be it gender, disability, racial, cultural, or religious. Refugees are increasing, due to war, conflict, and climate change with refugee related deaths in the thousands. Despite some countries showing improvement regarding inequality, it remains high, particularly in developing countries. Between country inequality has actually increased since 2015.

When Goal 10 was adopted, it was acknowledged that inequality is multidimensional and goes beyond poverty and economics. The emphasis on disaggregated data on SDG progress recognizes this point. National statistics expressed as averages mask social injustices. For example, the educational outcomes for an indigenous girl in a rural area are often vastly different from those of a wealthy boy in an urban setting. We endorse an ongoing commitment to collect and report disaggregated data as key to social policy development.

The world is also experiencing the negative impact of an increasing number of more regressive social policies that have increased discrimination rather than eliminating it. This includes discriminations based on gender, race, religion, national origin, disability and sexual orientation. At a recent meeting, the Secretary General

has called on us to “push back against the push back.” This message is essential if SDG10 is to be met.

Social policy has lagged. Although the pathway to increased equality has been identified, only one third of countries will have halved their national poverty levels by 2030. In addition to the many harms of Covid-19, the experiences of the pandemic do provide lessons for future policy choices. Those countries that strengthened social protection fared better. Countries that increased family or child subsidies reduced poverty rates, some significantly. Those that got children back in school quickly experienced fewer educational losses. Within and between country inequalities in access to clean water, sanitation and basic health care were highlighted as areas of need. In many cases, these can be addressed with modest investment.

The long-term effects of the pandemic suggest the increased need to pay attention to social integration and to reduce social isolation, especially for children and older persons. We are encouraged by the recognition of the importance of social factors in the organization of the Expert Group Meeting in advance of the 62nd session. The concept note pointed out that trust in institutions and between people has been falling and presents additional challenges for social policies to address the SDGs. Social considerations must be included in policies for the future and the profession of social work is committed to partnerships on this issue.

Globally, collaboration and partnerships as stated in SDG 17 are needed more than ever. The 2030 Agenda’s promise to leave no one behind and to meet the needs of the most vulnerable first cannot be met without partnerships between governments and civil society organizations, especially those active at the grassroots level. These are the places where many social workers work. Participatory approaches should be used in designing policies and programs to address inequality, engaging the most vulnerable in decisions that affect their lives.

As previously stated, SDG 1, SDG 10, and SDG 17 are fundamental priorities for the IASSW as these align with the organization’s principles and social work’s commitment for social justice and the wellbeing of individuals and communities worldwide. We request that the UN, its participating members, and civil society organizations, such as ours, work in collaboration to elevate the voices of those who have been historically marginalized, identify the root causes and develop or amplify appropriate policies for effective change, particularly for those who are most impacted by poverty and inequality. We hope the outcomes of the 62nd session will provide a beacon of hope and change for millions of people who live in impoverished, unjust, and marginalized situations.

More specifically, we call on the Commission for Social Development to endorse:

- More partnerships between governments and civil society organizations, including those active at the grassroots level, to identify and engage those most vulnerable and most likely to be left behind.
- A commitment to participation in policy design by those affected.
- Redoubling the attention to reduction of inequality and poverty eradication.
- Strengthen attention to social integration in the design of social policies.
- Ensure attention to the needs of migrants and refugees as one of the most vulnerable groups.
- Build on the lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic to strengthen social policies to achieve the SDGs.